

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING A CORE READING PROGRAM

1. What would an ideal set of reading/language arts instructional materials look like?
 - Do the instructional materials have a research-based foundation for the program?
 - Are there student anthologies with classic, contemporary, and multicultural literature, leveled reading books for beginning reading instruction, various types of assessments, and an easy-to-follow instructional sequence in the teacher's guide?
 - Do the supplemental offerings serve to support the basic set of materials?
2. How does the scope and sequence of this program/series, grade level by grade level, stack up to the Common Core Standards?
 - Explicit instruction, practice, and assessment in reading needs to address the five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. How comprehensive is your program for each of these areas, across all grades levels?
 - Are skills just introduced and taught once, or are they reviewed and assessed in a spiral fashion throughout the lessons, themes, and grade levels?
 - Is there a logical organizational structure for the skills and strategies that are taught? If so, what does this structure look like?
3. If the publishers make claims about the effectiveness of their products in promotional materials, what kind of research evidence is available to support these contentions?
 - Is there a scientific research document from the publisher that serves as the foundation for the program/series? Is it readily available?
 - Is there written evidence that the materials have been field-tested with teachers and real students? If so, what did the field-testing demonstrate? When did it take place? With what groups of students? And what were the results? What questions/concerns do these results raise about validity?
4. Who are the authors of the series or program?
 - Are they established educators and researchers in the field of literacy (reading)?
 - What has been their role in the development of the program?
 - Do they represent diverse perspectives and backgrounds?
 - What is their philosophy about the reading process and instruction and is it reflected in the materials?
5. If we follow a lesson from beginning to end, how much explicit instruction and modeling is included?
 - How much student practice is recommended?
 - How much silent "worksheet" work is included and recommended?
 - What is the balance between explicit instruction by the teacher and independent work by the student?
6. How many opportunities do students have to actually read and write about authentic topics?

Adapted from: Vogt, M.E. & Shearer, B. A. (2003). *Reading specialists in the real world*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. 2003.

- If the program claims to be “integrated,” how are the language arts (i.e. spelling, writing, and grammar) taught, modeled, assessed, and practiced?
7. What provisions are included for English Language Learners (ELLs)?
 - Are students provided with appropriate instruction of grade level concepts and vocabulary?
 - Are the supportive activities meaningful and useful for literacy acquisition?
 - Do they provide access to the same content as the English-only student is receiving?
 - Is there an obvious attempt to scaffold reading instruction for ELLs?
 - Is English proficiency taught and reinforced, as well as literacy skills?
 - Are the ELL recommendations more substantive than just one to two sentence cursory suggestions?
 8. What are the expectations of the materials regarding what children and adolescents know and can do?
 - Are these expectations appropriate to your school community?
 - What are the social skills and values being taught, modeled, and reinforced through the instructions plan and the literature? Are they appropriate for your school, district, and community context?
 - Are the stories and other literature pieces representative of your students who will be reading them? Will the students be able to make connections to themselves and their world?
 - Does the literature represent a variety of perspectives and views so that children/adolescents will have the opportunity to expand their own thinking? Are the discussions about values, ethics, and social contexts in agreement with the socio-cultural perspective of your community?
 9. Are the literary (including poetry) and informational texts well represented?
 - Is there a variety of text structures and genres?
 - Is there a wide enough variety of reading levels represented in the texts so that students of all reading abilities can have access to independent and instructional materials?
 10. Are the provisions for struggling readers and accelerated readers appropriate and doable?
 - Will teachers be able to include additional instruction and experiences for students within the daily instructional plan?
 - Is careful attention paid throughout the program to motivate all learners?
 11. Is the instructional plan appropriate?
 - Does it activate, utilize, and develop students’ background knowledge and experience?
 - Is there a balance of explicit instruction and multiple opportunities for students to practice and apply what they have learned?
 12. Is the instructional plan appropriate for a variety of teachers’ skills, experiences, and abilities?
 - Will all teachers find something they can use – whether beginning or experienced?
 - Will beginning teachers have enough structure and support to be successful with the program?

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- Is the plan easy to follow, comprehensive, and well designed?
 - Will experienced teachers find the instructional plans helpful, but not overly prescriptive?
- 13.** In the instructional plan, are learning goals and objectives clearly stated and then assessed?
- Does the plan ensure that students have exposure to, instruction in, practice with, and eventual mastery of the respective objectives and standards?
- 14.** Do supplemental materials, such as workbooks or technological tools, support and extend instruction, while providing opportunities for meaningful independent practice?
- 15.** Which of the supplemental materials are truly “supplemental” and which are really “necessary” for the program to run smoothly?
- If you don’t purchase the supplemental materials, what will be omitted instructionally?
- 16.** Are the pacing suggestions appropriate for your student population?
- Is there a way to “slow down” or “speed up” the instruction without incurring additional, time-consuming work for the teacher?
- 17.** Are there extra handbooks or other resources, including technology, that contain important Instructional lesson plans for students needing additional support?
- For accelerated learners?
 - For English Language Learners (ELL)?
 - What is in these handbooks? How will they be used?
 - What will happen to these students if the handbooks are overlooked by teachers or not purchased by the district?
- 18.** What is the role of assessment?
- Is it integrated throughout the program?
 - Is it viewed as an ongoing process?
 - What skills are tested?
 - What is the format of the assessments and other tests?
 - Are there performance assessments as well as, other formats that are reflective of standardized tests?
 - What is the balance of assessment formats?
- 19.** Is there an appropriate balance between the number of pages of skills work, workbook pages, and so forth, and more authentic opportunities to respond to text?
- Look beyond the labels. Most publishers will use similar labels, such as “intervention,” “scaffolded instruction,” or “integration.” Take a closer look at the actual instruction, rather than just accepting the label at face value.
- 20.** Is the teacher encouraged to use a variety of grouping configurations throughout the week’s plans?
- Do students have opportunities to engage in meaningful activities with partners? Small groups? The whole class?

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